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Here we are 137 years since James Launchbury started worship services in his own cottage in Old Botley, behind the present McDonald's.

In 1976, Chris White compiled a detailed history of our church. Along with information from the Alden family of Malmsbury, an updated history of our church has been printed. If you have not read it, please take a copy and read the very rich history of God-at-work in Botley, and share it with those those who don't know.

We have said this often, and we know it well, the Church is not a building; the Church is a gathering of people who share a common faith, that Jesus is the promised Messiah from God, who came to restore our relationship with our Father, as it was in the beginning.

A building cannot share this faith - it can declare it through inscriptions and banners and signs, but it is people who believe this message, believe it to be true, and therefore, choose to live by it.

We do strange and inexplicable things. Jesus proudly refers to us as "**His Bride**", but we transfer our identity onto a building, as if to say, a building matters more than people. The Apostles, Paul and Peter among many, would be appalled that buildings called "Churches" are named after them, giving them greater importance over the Christ they loved and served, whose message of reconciliation they preached and defended, and ultimately for whom they gave their life!

Our text today is from the familiar account of Pentecost, celebrated as the birth of the Church. In his unrehearsed and unscripted message to the gathered crowd in Jerusalem, Peter lays **two** cornerstones for "Church":

### **1. The history of a worshipping people is the history of the Church.**

Many in the crowd thought they were seeing *a bunch of drunken men misbehaving*. Not so, says Peter and quotes God's speaking through the prophet Joel said: in the last days of human history, God will pour out His

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Spirit on the followers of Christ, and they will prophesy, see visions and dream dreams, all of which will seem like the incoherent babbling of drunk men to people to those who don't know God's Word well enough to recognise His promise being fulfilled in their presence!

In reality, this group of worshipping people were reversing the curse of Babel, when language divided people, now uniting people as they spoke God's message in languages people understood!

The history of a worshipping people was being played out at the birth of the Church, and since then, the history of an ever growing group of worshipping people, is the history of the Church.

The second cornerstone is:

## **2. The Church's single mission is to find ways to PROCLAIM the message of Jesus Christ.**

*Peter declares, People of Israel, Listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders and signs through Him ... but God knew what would happen ... with the aid of godless men, you nailed Him to the cross and killed Him. BUT God released Him from the horrors of death and raised Him back to life, for death could not keep Him in its grip.*

What a power-packed statement! God publicly endorsed Jesus who did miracles, wonders and signs, **not** by His own power, but by the power of God Himself, and godless people who saw Him do these things, would not accept Jesus as the Son of God, and therefore put Him to death. But death has no power over life (*cf: David Attenborough's documentary film on the iguana caught by snakes, a powerful image of the weakness of death and the strength of life*). Death could not hold Jesus in its grip, and He is restored to eternal life with the Father.

Peter quoting from David's prophetic Psalms, *You will not leave my soul among the dead, nor allow your Holy One to rot in the grave.*

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The mission of the Church is to proclaim, **not** the crucified Christ, which is a historical fact, but the **RISEN** Christ. This is the miracle God calls us to believe with all our heart, soul and mind.

And this is the message the Church is expected to declare: the grip of death, which holds us back from God, has been broken by the death **AND** resurrection of Jesus.

Peter's unrehearsed, unscripted message sets these two foundation stones for the Church:

1. We are the continuing history of God's people. We are called to faithful worship, not programmes, nor traditions, not even to do good works, but to be faithful in our worship of God whose only desire for us is to return to the Eden He created for us.
2. To faithfully declare, in a **loving and respectful** way, the message of God lived out in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus our Christ.

Some time soon, we will make this declaration when we set the **Foundation Stone** in our new building which declares, this is the place where the continuing history of God's people in Botley meet and continue to worship; when the **Cross** is installed, we will faithfully declare our faith in God's message of the power of life over death, the resurrection of Jesus the Christ!

See what happens when we are faithful in worship and faithful in proclamation:

**The Holy Spirit steps in to do what we cannot and should not.** 3,000 people responded to Peter's heartfelt message.

Peter wasn't **converting** people, which implies a human effort to persuade and a human effort to change, and God forbid we should ever think our efforts lead to the conversion of people!

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It was the partnership between Peter faithfully proclaiming his personal knowledge and experienced about Jesus, and the Holy Spirit do His work which results in **transformation** in the lives of people, the work of God through the Holy Spirit. When we work in partnership with the Holy Spirit, watch what happens:

Peter did not instruct people what to do. On hearing his message, the **PEOPLE** asked, **What shall we do?**, to which Peter replied, **repent**, confess your thoughts and deeds that are not right before God, AND **re-form** your behaviour to let the glory of God be in seen in you!

**The result?** Those who believed Peter's message, were baptised and the Church grew by 3,000. They bonded together to become the Church God is proud of, by **(1)** devoting themselves to the Apostles teaching, **(2)** and to fellowship, **(3)** and to sharing in meals, **(4)** and to prayer.

It is the partnership between our faithful worship and faithful declaration and the work of the Holy Sprit that grows the Church God is proud of!

On this our 137 anniversary of being a worshipping people in Botley, let's renew ourselves to be the Church Jesus dreams us to be: a Church proud of its history, proud that its history is a part of God's history here and now; a Church which proclaims by word, by deed, and through the quality of our lives, that we live the renewed life we talk of because we are a transformed people. Let's renew ourselves to be the Church God delights in pouring out His blessing, rooted in the teaching of the Word of God, bonded in fellowship, accepting of anyone who joins in worship, using the resources God has placed in our care, meeting peoples' need, all of which is undergirded in a life of prayer.

Everything else flows from this.

**AMEN.**